

DIVERSITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION — SOME PROBLEMS RELATING TO THE GENESIS AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MARTIN REPORT

Discussions of diversity in Australian higher education are dominated by the vexed question of the relationship between universities and colleges of advanced education. More recently, the developing and expanding role of technical and further education has raised the additional question of how this sector relates to the colleges now, and how the relationship will develop in the future. For some years Australian post-secondary education has experienced changes in the relationship between colleges and universities, the two major and at present dominant types of institutions. Any analysis of these changes, which seeks to illuminate the dynamics of Australian education, must be made in the light of their historical and political context.

When Menzies became Prime Minister in 1949, the universities found him a generous benefactor. Menzies saw the universities as serving 'the crucial role of training the nation's leaders'¹, and in retirement, he recalled the dramatic development of the universities during his long term of office with 'great pride and satisfaction'². However, by the end of the 1960s, following the recommendations of the Martin Report of 1965 new institutions had appeared — the colleges of advanced education — to change the nature of higher education in Australia. The nature and extent of these changes as they have developed since 1965 provide the essential background to the several enquiries into higher education being conducted at the present time at State and Commonwealth levels³. The call for diversity in higher education that led to the creation of the colleges can still be heard today in the most recent Report of the Tertiary Education Commission⁴.

The Martin Report was born out of an earlier report, the Murray Report, itself produced in response to a perceived need in the mid-1950s for many more university graduates of various kinds. As Williams quoted the Report of the latter Committee,

High intellectual ability is in short supply and no country can afford to waste it; every boy or girl with the necessary brainpower must in the national interest be encouraged to come forward for a University education, and there must be a suitable place in a good university for everyone who does come forward⁵.

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Support for a substantial increase in the university sector had been urged by the Australian Academy of Science in a report on scientific and technological manpower needs, issued in late 1957.

The technical economy of a country . . . is set not only by the material resources available, but very largely by the technical and intellectual resources . . . The Australian Academy of Science has been very greatly concerned . . . that the Commonwealth's development is being hampered by a shortage of scientific and technological manpower . . . The long-term outlook is very grave; unless dramatic measures are adopted the development of the country will be tragically hindered⁶.

The Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee (AVCC) had also added its voice to the calls for a coordinated expansion of university education, in particular for 'three-to-five-year grants to enable universities to plan ahead and for the appointment of a Committee to prepare an overall plan of university development to meet future needs'⁷. Adoption of the Murray Committee's recommendations, a matter of considerable satisfaction to Menzies, led to a substantial increase in funding, and notably, the adoption of triennial funding and the establishment of a permanent Australian Universities Commission (AUC) in 1959. However, the Report was considered by the AUC to be inadequate as a basis for long term planning.

Thus, in its first report, the AUC asked for an advisory committee to examine and provide expert opinion on the problem of future university design. Menzies appointed a committee of the AUC under the leadership of its Chairman, Sir Leslie Martin, to enquire into the future of tertiary education in Australia, viz., 'to consider the pattern of tertiary education in relation to the needs and resources of Australia, and to make recommendations to the Commission on the future development of tertiary education'⁸. Although a committee of the Universities Commission, the Martin Committee reported in large part on tertiary education outside the universities. The emphasis appears to have been expected, for, in Menzies' words, the committee was

to examine the broad problems of tertiary education, and in particular the possibility of devising some structure which would provide for what might be called a tertiary alternative, offering the prospect of advanced education to many students who had no desire (or opportunity) to take a university course⁹.

This expansion and diversification was to make higher education 'available to all citizens according to their inclination and capacity' and, significantly, to serve 'the needs of the community in promoting dynamic economic growth'¹⁰. Such changes were to take higher education beyond the development of the universities that had followed from the Murray Report. Before considering the Committee's recommendations on the forms of expansion in tertiary education, it is interesting to note the anticipation of some of these recommendations in a paper presented by Professor Partridge of the Australian National University at the 31st Summer School of the Australian Institute of Political Science in early 1965, that is, eight weeks before the Martin Report was presented to Parliament.

In that paper, Partridge anticipated that the Martin Committee would propose 'a substantial reconstruction of our institutional system of tertiary education'¹¹. These changes were to be inspired by several widely-accepted articles of social ideology at that time, viz., 'that everyone who can profit from a period of advanced education should be given the opportunity to have it, and that it is an obligation of governments to ensure that the facilities are available'. Further,

that modern industrial economies will increasingly require a rapidly-growing body of men educated in the sciences and technologies, and a constantly-expanding output of research; and they will also require a more highly educated population generally, since only a well-educated people has the adaptability and flexibility demanded in an economy characterised by incessant innovation¹².

The close parallel with the stance of the Martin Committee is immediately apparent, so it is not surprising that Partridge then turned to a consideration of the future institutionalisation of higher education. He noted that the Australian system is considerably less diversified than the systems of the U.K. or the U.S.A. In his view, these new demands on higher education will 'bring about a radical diversification in our pattern of higher education, by creating a number of new institutions with their own character and with specialised functions'¹³. In this regard the recommendations of the Martin Report were to differ appreciably from those of the Murray Report which had concerned only universities. Partridge was echoing the concern ex-

pressed by Menzies some years earlier when the Martin committee was established as to whether 'you go on just increasing the number of universities on the stock pattern, or whether there ought to be a greater variety of instruments of tertiary education'¹⁴. Partridge anticipated that diversity would derive not just from the creation of new institutions, but also from the universities, which would evolve 'giving different degrees of emphasis to different functions'¹⁵. An interesting insight into the fate of some of the Martin Committee's recommendations, still to be made public at that time, is contained in Partridge's comment that diversification flies in the face of 'a powerful Australian sentiment — the belief that all the universities should be similar and equal'.

We may be able to keep all our institutions of university rank roughly equal and uniform provided we do not mind their being equally bad or equally mediocre. Australian institutional uniformity and the parochialism which still powerfully survives from our colonial and early federal past, are formidable obstacles to the development of a varied and flexible pattern of higher education.¹⁶

In the discussion following Partridge's paper a specific illustration of this trend toward homogenization was offered by Dr. Matheson, Vice-Chancellor of Monash University. Although attempting to produce a university different in character from the University of Melbourne, Matheson noted that he soon found himself 'Vice-Chancellor of a University that is disappointingly like the University of Melbourne', due no doubt in large part to the influence of that clause in the Monash University Act 'to the effect that the standard of the degree shall not be less than that prevailing in the University of Melbourne'¹⁷. Clearly the long-term prospects of diversification coming from recommendations of the Martin Report were not encouraging.

The Martin Report recommended that further development of higher education was to occur within a tripartite (or tripod) system composed of universities, Boards of Teacher Education (including teachers' colleges) and Institutes of Colleges (including technical colleges).

The three parts of the proposed tripartite system bore varying degrees of resemblance to existing institutions. The universities were to be modified only slightly, e.g., by decreasing part-time and external studies and by increasing post-graduate study. Teachers' colleges and technical colleges were to be substantially changed. For example, teachers' colleges would be removed from Education Departments and gradually develop autonomy from the Board of Teacher Education. Technical colleges were to be changed in several major respects with

the aim of achieving a status 'comparable' to that of universities. Universities were unable, as conservative institutions, to provide the variety of education 'needed by young people with a varying range of abilities and a broad array of educational objectives'¹⁸. Hence new institutions were required, which were to differ substantially from universities.

Thus, the work at colleges and universities would differ 'in the greater emphasis on the practical and applied aspects of the subjects at the technical college as opposed to the more general and analytical treatment developed at the university'¹⁹. Colleges would not engage in post-graduate work and the main emphasis would be on teaching diploma courses. The cost per student in colleges would be less than in universities, rising to about 60% of university costs in 1971²⁰.

The college student population 'on the average will be of a somewhat lower academic capacity but overlapping in ability with those taking university courses'²¹. They will be subject to less rigorous entrance requirements and thus will include some 'less academic students and late developers'²². However, the Committee emphasised that these students should enjoy 'education' rather than merely 'training', i.e., developing the student's 'critical, imaginative and creative abilities' as he develops in to a liberal-educated technologist 'alive to the human and social relations' of his work²³. In the Committee's view, student transfers between sectors, e.g. universities and colleges, needed to be facilitated, thus reinforcing diversity in the then 'simple and rather inflexible'²⁴ pattern of higher education.

In considering the future of its proposals for the colleges, the Committee was aware of the temptation for the colleges to adapt to follow the university model.

While the Committee is anxious that the academic status of the constituent members of Institutes of Colleges should be raised as rapidly as possible, it insists that they should resist the temptation to copy the educational processes and curricula of universities. The Committee's proposals envisage a greater diversity of tertiary education in Australia, but any hope of achieving this diversity would be nullified if colleges attempted to transform themselves into universities. The responsibilities of colleges to the community are of a different kind²⁵.

In presenting the Report to Parliament on 24 March 1965, Prime Minister Menzies accepted the major recommendation of the Report in these words:

I turn now to consider the new concept which is the heart of this report. It is that

Australia, during the next decade, should develop advanced education in virtually new types of colleges . . . We, for our part, accept the broad concept . . . (and) we see these colleges as designed primarily for teaching at the tertiary level and as catering for the diploma not the post-diploma student . . . (and) we do not make our support available for the development out of these colleges of new universities²⁶.

One point of disagreement is immediately apparent. The Government rejected the proposal that the colleges would develop to the point where they would provide post-diploma courses leading to degrees. Other disagreements, some quite major ones, were present, especially with regard to one of the legs of the tripod system of institutional types and the coordination of the entire tertiary education system. The Government rejected responsibility for teacher education and funding for teachers' colleges as being the responsibility of the States. The tripod system was to be a binary system. Other less dramatic recommendations were also modified by the Government. For example, in contrast to the Committee, the Government saw part-time and external studies as valuable university functions.

The proposal to expand the AUC to form a Tertiary Education Commission, (TEC), with responsibilities for universities and the new Institutes was not endorsed. A separate advisory committee, the Commonwealth Advisory Committee on Advanced Education (CACAE), was established to advise the Government (in a manner analogous to the AUC) and to determine in more detail the role of the colleges.

Gorton, then Minister-in-charge of Commonwealth Activities in Education and Research, is quoted as asserting 'that it would be wrong for the Government to define what the colleges were going to be, or for it to lay down a blue-print for their development'²⁷. Under its chairman, Ian Wark, the CACAE accepted this task as a major early objective. In its first report, as Wark later was to write, the Committee stated that within the Colleges there would be

- students with somewhat different types of interests
- a greater concentration upon part-time studies associated with employment, especially in scientific fields
- a more applied emphasis
- a more direct and intimate relationship with industry and other relevant organizations
- far less attention to post-graduate training and research
- a primary emphasis on teaching²⁸.

The spectre of the university model was apparent from the beginning, for the Committee asserted that colleges 'should aim to provide a range of

education of a standard of excellence and richness of content at least equal to that of any other sector of tertiary education in this country'²⁹. This competition extended even into architecture, for the CACAE decided that 'the colleges should match the inexpensive but elegant standards already adopted by the AUC'³⁰. In a number of respects the CACAE went beyond the Martin Report to obtain funds for rapid development of library facilities in colleges, and to establish an educational research programme in the colleges, 'the first occasion on which the Commonwealth government had specifically supported educational research'³¹.

Debate about the policy that the colleges would be different in kind but equal in stature to universities continued in a lively and sometimes heated fashion. The Conference on Planning in Higher Education, held in 1969 and chaired by Robert McCaig of the University of New England, recommended that higher education be developed as a co-ordinated system of diverse institutions which would offer a wide variety of courses that would cater for the diversity of student needs and preferences³². The Conference rejected as inadequate the distinction between university students, as those having analytical minds, and college students, as those having practical minds. Transfer of students between institutions was to be facilitated, and the whole diversified system would be co-ordinated by a Higher Education Commission, not dissimilar to that proposed by the Martin Committee for their tripod system.

At the first conference of the Federation of Staff Associations of Australian Colleges of Advanced Education (FSAACAE)* held in Warburton in 1970, the key-note speaker, Eric Robinson, then Deputy-Director of the North-East London Polytechnic, rejected much of the thinking behind the binary system, and saw the need for the colleges to develop their role beyond a frozen model reflecting what a university was not.

It is absurd to talk of 'parity of esteem' between the thinkers and the doers . . . If we accept the dichotomy between thought and action it is inevitable that thought will emerge as superior³³.

and,

We cannot build the good society by rigidly dividing the functions of education. We cannot build the good society by educating some sensitive people, some clever people, and some practical people, mixing them together and hoping that something good comes out of it. We must educate all people to be sensitive, clever and practical and recognise that everybody has the right to some extent to follow his interests and enjoy himself in education and research. This should not be a prerogative of the minority³⁴.

The Martin Report's distinction between colleges and universities as that of providing different 'types' of education was criticized by H. Williams, Principal of the Western Australian Institute of Technology and a member of the CACAE, who saw the diversity between universities and colleges as one of emphasis. Colleges contributed to diversity in specific ways by emphasising that 'a major task of tertiary education is to meet the needs of . . . society' and by an 'emphasis on education and student needs'³⁵. Williams rejected as erroneous the distinction between degree level and diploma level 'as if these were precise in meaning and mutually exclusive'³⁶. College degree courses, being different from the university ones, did not present a threat to diversity in tertiary education, as was implied in Menzies' speech cited earlier.

The developing nature of the colleges' role was more evident in the second report of the CACAE, issued in 1969. As Bain summarizes the report, the Committee

emphasized that it was dealing with 'an evolving concept not susceptible to close definition'. It defined technology all-inclusively as 'the application of human knowledge to satisfy human need'—excluding only courses offered for their own sake. It thus extended the role of the colleges well beyond their technical beginnings³⁷.

The question of research in colleges has been a vexed one since the beginning. With this second report of the CACAE, research was seen to be acceptable, although it was to be oriented to the applied field.

While academic research is not encouraged, college staff are expected to take the initiative in the application of knowledge, and the opinion is expressed that the application of knowledge to specific problems, while it may call for different qualities of mind, is no less exacting than fundamental research³⁸.

The view that research is a peculiarly university function is expressed by the AUC in several reports, for example, 'the commitment of University staff to research and of the universities to offering higher degrees by research work should be the prime differentiation between universities and colleges'³⁹. In commenting on the encouragement of research in the colleges, Bain observes that the CACAE 'removed one of the foundations of Martin and Government thinking on the differences between colleges and universities'⁴⁰.

College research has always been seen as an activity that must not dominate the college environment. The college emphasis was to remain on

* Renamed, as of August 1979, F. C. A. (Federation of College Academics).

undergraduate teaching, with research forming only a small component of college activities, and, if possible, the research was to be related to the teaching function. College administrations were allowed to provide 'a small measure of time, space and funds for these (research) activities'⁴¹. Pressures to extend this research activity can be expected to continue, whittling away further this distinction between the two types of institutions. For example, an editorial in the journal of FSAACAE observed with obvious regret that 'the commission (on advanced education) still believes that research is the domain of the universities'⁴².

The reports of the Australian Research Grants Commission provide specific instances of research undertaken in colleges that can compete for funds with comparable university projects. As one instance, in N.S.W. in 1977 the colleges accounted for 5 new and 5 continuing grants to a total of about \$40,000, which is only about 1% of the total funds awarded in the State. In numbers of projects in N.S.W. these grants amount to 2.5% of total projects, but 4% of new projects⁴³.

Even the relative costs between universities and colleges which provided a strong economic incentive to expand the tertiary sector as Martin suggested also seem to be diminishing, and costs per students are comparable⁴⁴. Bain has summarized the changing relationship between colleges and universities:

research is increasingly being conducted in the colleges, the colleges are offering higher degrees, salaries are equal, or nearly so, costs per student are converging, universities are establishing closer relations with industry, pass rates are not higher at the colleges, university pass rates have not risen, college courses are not 'less difficult' than those at university, and so on. The colleges and universities are indeed converging, with the differences between them becoming ones of emphasis⁴⁵.

More recently the AUC, in its Report on the proposal for a fourth university in Victoria, listed 'typical characteristics which reflect differences in definition and purpose of colleges compared with universities'⁴⁶. The distinctions listed by the CACAE in its first report mentioned earlier have persisted together with the low level of involvement in research, and, as discussed below, an increasing but small number of degree courses.

In 1969, three significant changes in tertiary education occurred — the inclusion of teacher education courses in some colleges, the awarding of equal salaries for college and university staff, and the approval of degree courses in colleges. Gorton, now Prime Minister, implemented the Mar-

tin Committee's recommendation for financial support for teacher education by including teacher education within colleges. Gorton (but not the Cabinet) had been sympathetic to this proposal when proposed back in 1964⁴⁷. This was consistent with Gorton's inclusion of teacher education in the new college of advanced education in Canberra. This institution was additional to those proposed by the Martin Committee. It was established on the recommendation of the Burton Committee in 1966, and served, at least for Gorton, the role of a model for the States⁴⁸. With this change, teachers' colleges were moved into the advanced education sector rather than constituting a separate system as the Martin Report had proposed.⁴⁹

In 1968, the Victorian Institute of Colleges, which had been given the authority to grant degrees during an election campaign by the then Premier Henry Bolte, awarded the first college degrees in Australia to graduates of the Victorian College of Pharmacy. Subsequently a Committee of Inquiry into Awards in Colleges of Advanced Education, the Wiltshire Committee, supported the award of college degrees when endorsed by a national accreditation body⁵⁰. The report contains a further analysis of the emerging characteristics of colleges and their students. They show little change from those already considered. Disappointingly, there is no comment on the sources of the data used to derive these generalizations about the colleges.

Since colleges could award degrees, it could be presumed that at least some college staff were equivalent to university staff and deserved equal salaries and conditions of appointment. This parity was supported by the Commonwealth on the recommendation of Justice Sweeney. In his report, Sweeney concluded that the duties and responsibilities of college academic staff were comparable to those of university staff and consequently recommended equal salary for equal performance⁵¹. Quite recently, in 1976, this parity has been modified somewhat by changes in the salary levels applying to colleges, compared with those recommended for universities.

The Martin Committee's recommendation to establish a single commission responsible for tertiary education was rejected by the Government. This decision has been commended as ensuring the mature development of the colleges, 'for had the recommendation been accepted . . . the colleges would have been doomed at that time to play second fiddle'⁵². The need for co-ordination and planning would appear to be self-evident, but many efforts have been at best sporadic and incomplete. Consultation between the CACAE and the AUC eventually became regular, but was viewed by the participants in different ways. In their Fourth

Report, the CAE (Commission on Advanced Education—as it had now become) described the 'close working relationship' with the AUC, involving regular consultations 'to secure co-operation and rationalization of effort in tertiary education'⁵³. The corresponding report of the AUC is less euphoric and major open disagreements, for example, on estimated student enrolments in the 1976-1978 period, suggest that the consultation was at best incomplete.

Detailed proposals for a single commission in higher education were prepared in 1975, following the announcement on 30 May 1975 by Prime Minister Whitlam of the decision to amalgamate the AUC and the CAE. With the change of government in late 1975 this amalgamation was postponed.

In April 1977, the Government announced the establishment of a single Tertiary Education Commission to work with and co-ordinate three Councils — a Universities Council, an Advanced Education Council, and a Technical and Further Education (TAFE) Council. These Councils resemble the now defunct commissions of the same name. 'Tertiary' education has now taken on a wider meaning than previously to cover all post-secondary education. Further development in the colleges and TAFE institutions will undoubtedly be influenced by this over-arching Commission, and it may well be significant that the previous head of the AUC, Professor Karmel, serves as Chairman.

The delicacy of the university-college relation in particular can be seen in discussions about possible amalgamation of institutions, possibilities made more immediate following the reports on post-secondary education in several states. Both the AUC and the CAE favoured the more rational use of resources in tertiary education, but their views on amalgamation did not coincide. Concerning possible joining of teachers' colleges and universities, the AUC in its Sixth report reaffirmed its position that students, staff and courses at the teachers' college would have to be acceptable to the university concerned⁵⁴. The CAE questioned the claim that 'universities stand in a special relationship to government in such matters as the allocation of resources', and that in discussions of amalgamation 'the basis of discussion and action is that the university will absorb the college'. Although the CAE suggested that there are 'other bases for amalgamation', specific suggestions were not offered⁵⁵.

The tendency for the colleges and universities to converge towards a common function has been discussed in several places. Some of the factors contributing to this convergence have been noted by Wark:

Not only do staff tend consciously or unconsciously to recreate their almae matres but the members of course-assessment committees, also largely derived from universities tend to influence activities in CAEs towards a university pattern⁵⁶.

The phenomenon of convergence, or 'academic drift' is not unexpected nor peculiarly Australian. In a study of American higher education, White has pointed out that in the expansion during the 1960s, 'institutions low in the higher education status order (have moved) quickly to model their work on that of institutions higher in the status order' resulting in 'a homogenization of the content and style of institutions in the system'⁵⁷. Pressure for homogenization offers 'little opportunity for new or aspiring institutions to challenge the competitive advantages of institutions high in the existing hierarchy'.⁵⁸ To quote a particular example in the U.K.,

when one college of technology became a university, the proportion of middle-class students increased, a higher proportion entered with traditional qualifications, more had long-term intentions of undergoing post-secondary education, fewer lacked parental support to go on to college and the image of the college as having direct links with industry faded⁵⁹.

Within the Australian context, Australian universities are also prone to homogenization. This tendency may find wider expression as TAFE institutions come under the influence of the tertiary sector, and receive greater encouragement and resources to develop. As Williams has commented, 'it may be that the colleges of advanced education have moved too close to the university pattern. It is important that TAFE should not'.⁶⁰

Williams has cogently pointed out that, unfortunately, comparative research on tertiary institutions in Australia has been restricted generally to 'finance, government, structures and sectors, rather than with the processes of education'⁶⁰. Discussion over the years has often tended to be prescriptive rather than descriptive on the subject of diversity among institutions. As Treyvaud and McLaren have noted⁶¹, what has been lacking in general has been the empirical data on the characteristics of various institutions, their students, staff and educational processes. Such data have been collected in the U.K. and, particularly, in the USA⁶².

An important and, sad to say, solitary contribution to our understanding of what goes on in at least some tertiary educational institutions has been the Report of the Regional Colleges Project, a major multi-disciplinary study of non-metropolitan colleges, 'their cost structures, their organization and administration, staff, students, courses, their rela-

tionship to their local communities and their actual possible roles within the college system and within the areas where they are located⁶³.

The Report provides an arresting comment that applies to much of the discussion about Australian education, and, as well, many of the comments cited in this paper. The term 'college of advanced education' can hardly be used accurately to describe the wide range of institutions in the college sector. This sector already contains a diverse range of institutions, and much of the commentary about 'academic drift' is more appropriately applied to the larger than the smaller colleges.

There are marked differences between individual colleges and between groups of colleges. For example, colleges vary substantially in size, structure, location and history . . . Diversity is a dominating characteristic of the CAE sector in Australia, but its present extent is not always recognised, even by those concerned with post-secondary education . . . and can make generalisation difficult, complicate any precise definition of college objectives, and render ambiguous attempts to determine how fully they meet them⁶⁴.

The Report is an invaluable contribution to a more intelligent appreciation of the nature of diversity in Australian institutions, although it is restricted to one part of the CAE sector. Further data on the processes of education within courses and institutions promised in the Report of the Williams Committee, have not been included in that Report.⁶⁵

Comparisons among institutions are likely to include an agitated debate about quality, reputation and standards. Submissions to the Williams Committee on the means of evaluating the quality and efficiency of the education system illustrate the volatility of this debate⁶⁶. Quality is an elusive concept and broad comparisons between institutions as a whole are particularly vulnerable to subjective bias. Commenting about Australian institutions, Selby Smith has cautioned that 'comparisons should be confined to similar departments or even courses provided in different institutions⁶⁴. The rate of change of institutional quality in Australia may not be comparable to that in the U.S.A., but Riesman's analogy, quoted by Watts, is still pertinent: 'While autos carry their advertising, so to speak, on their body shells, which speak as loudly as print or TV commercials, colleges can change their shells with hardly anyone's noticing⁶⁷.

A common factor in these studies of institutions and their processes is the call for a change of focus, away from 'quality' to 'effectiveness' as a yardstick of comparison. It is important that attention be given to what actually happens in the institutional environment, for, to state the obvious, it is only by

looking at the results of studies like those described here that knowledge will be obtained about what the institution, be it college or university, is doing, rather than what it professes to be doing.

In retrospect, it can be seen that a significant omission from the Martin Report was a form of preamble that stated explicitly the philosophical and educational framework appropriate to thinking about the role and functions of the universities, colleges and teachers' colleges. Its omission contributed to the confusion, conflict and at times contradictory pressures that followed the publication of the Report⁶⁸. It was to be hoped that the Williams Committee, whose chairman was well aware of the 'marked similarity' between the terms of reference of his committee and those of the Martin Committee, did not commit the same sin of omission.⁶⁵

Detailed critiques of this most recent Report and its impact on post-secondary education will undoubtedly continue to appear⁶⁹. In the context of this paper, several points can be noted already. In particular, the influence of the Martin Report is very evident. Indeed, the Report is peppered with references to the Martin and Murray Reports, which have served as basic resource documents for the Committee.

The structure of post-secondary education, grown since the Martin Report somewhat like Topsy, is to remain basically unchanged. As for the vexed question of diversity, the Williams Report concurs with the view expressed by the several recent State Reports, that overlap between the three sectors is 'essential to the provision of adequate variety in and opportunities for post-secondary education'⁷⁰.

The educational ideals espoused by the Williams Report show substantial links to those of the Martin and the Murray Reports. Although the Reports vary somewhat in their relative emphasis, all three share these five objectives for education: develop the mental and affective capacities of individuals; educate and train for specific occupations; cultivate personal values; promote social mobility; and advance learning through scholarship and research.

It might have been hoped that these general educational objectives would have been elaborated into a more detailed framework that would serve the community well in the uncertain future. The Report's limited discussion is however restricted to a description of the *status quo*. Moreover, it is found, not as the opening statement to this major Report, but only as the penultimate chapter in a document of 815 pages!

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ACCOUNTABILITY OF TERTIARY EDUCATION AT THE NATIONAL LEVEL: A CHIMERA?

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The Notion of Educational Accountability

In recent years accountability has become a popular subject in the educational literature, and has been widely accepted as representing a legitimate demand on education. However, it is doubtful whether the notion of accountability can be sensibly applied to Australian tertiary education considered at the national system level. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that in relation to the national system of tertiary education, defined to comprise universities, colleges of advanced education, and institutions of technical and further education, there are fundamental and perhaps insoluble problems associated with achieving accountability. There are problems of a conceptual nature, problems in methodology, and problems in practical application associated with the particular organisational structure and division of powers in Australian tertiary education.

In discussing accountability, it is essential first to define the term since,

*as with other popular terms, accountability has come to function as a kind of code word pointing to an extremely complex, subtle, and shifting array of phenomena — as well as a discharging mechanism for venting various attitudinal stances and values*¹

In this paper accountability is taken to mean the application of an evaluation process to an educational institution or set of institutions in order to provide particular types of required information to the public or to some particular client group or audience. The information required generally relates to one or more of four questions:

- Are the goals being pursued legitimate and appropriate?
- Is resource utilisation consistent with the purposes for which the resources were allocated?
- Is the process effective; that is, are the outcomes congruent with the goals?
- Is the process efficient; that is, were the outcomes produced at minimum cost?

Accountability involving questions of this type can not be applied to an education system or institution in any meaningful way unless the system or institution is subject to a rational management process. In other words, planning, implementation, evaluation, and accountability, are related in a sequential and

iterative manner; accountability involves the evaluation of these three prior activities in the context of their interrelationships. Each of these management concepts will now be examined in relation to accountability in order to demonstrate the conceptual, methodological and contextual difficulties.

Accountability and Educational Planning

Anderson and Bowman describe educational planning as *a process of preparing a set of decisions for action in the future*.² Blaug supports this definition with the view that *educational planning necessarily involves making conscious decisions now that have further consequences for action that will have to be taken in the future*.³ A critical part of any planning process is agreement on purposes to be pursued, or in operational terms, the intended outcomes or the goals to be attained. Bowen provides the useful concept of operational goals as being *hypotheses about desirable outcomes that can be achieved, or at least approximated in practice*.⁴ Further, planning involves making rational judgements about the implications of accepting or rejecting a particular policy or set of policies. Such rational decision-making includes proposals for implementation; that is, it will take into account matters of efficiency in the use of resources and courses of action that will allow for the most effective achievement of goals. Planning in tertiary education, then, is concerned with determining appropriate educational purposes, setting specific attainable goals related to these purposes, and determining by a rational decision-making process the approach by which the goals are to be accomplished.

Accountability in relation to the planning process is essentially accountability in terms of these activities; that is, it concerns the legitimacy and appropriateness of goals, priorities, and the proposed means of accomplishment. There are serious difficulties in applying accountability in this area. For the tertiary or post-secondary education system in Australia there has been no clear statement of an accepted set of purposes for the system, no clear ordering of priorities, and no clear allocation of purposes or priorities in a way which differentiates the three sectors or their constituent institutions. As a consequence, operational goals cannot be derived from purposes nor justified in relation to them. This situation causes problems at the micro level of individual institutions and programmes, but is particularly intractable at the macro level of state and